

• *John's ministry fulfilled scripture*

1. A ministry of restoration

• *By preaching*

• *Revival is something God does*

• *A call to backsliding Israel*

• *The entire human race to experience salvation*

2. A ministry of warning

• *To those who had no interest in living a godly life*

• *God does not require good ancestry – he requires repentance*

The gospels refer to the way in which John's ministry fulfilled Scripture ^{☐1}. All of them quote Isaiah 40:3; Mark also quotes Malachi 3:1 and Luke adds Isaiah 40:4-5 ^{☐2}.

1. **John was exercising a ministry of restoration** ^{☐1}. He did his work by preaching. He was '*the voice ... crying in the wilderness...*' ^{☐2}. It was a lonely work. The spiritual leaders in Israel had wandered far from God's truth. Israel was in a period of spiritual decay and deadness. Their spiritual leaders were in the work of God simply for their own advantage. Preaching had almost died out. Godly people were hard to find.

But God does not let His Church die out. From time to time He sends spiritual revival to His people. 'Revival' is not something that we organise; it is something that God does. No one was 'organising' a revival in the days of John the Baptist. God was simply raising up a man to bring many of His people to their senses.

God does not call unsaved people to 'prepare' for salvation. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! But John is preaching to Israel, to the common people. Many of them have faith in the promises of God but they have become cold and backslidden. When God's people wish to be restored to newness of life, they need to take action to get their lives right. They need to make a straight road for Him ^{☐1}. If they would do that, impossible obstacles would be cleared out of the way. The valleys and mountains that make travel so complicated would be flattened so that the pathway would be easier ^{☐2}. The crooked and the rough would be rectified ^{☐3}.

Also there would be a result in the lives of others. '*All flesh shall see the salvation of our God*' ^{☐1}. The entire human race would get to experience the salvation that was coming to Israel ^{☐2}, if His people would get ready for what God was about to do.

2. **John was exercising a ministry of warning** ^{☐1}. God was drawing near to Israel and was offering His people a way to return to Him.

John the Baptist took note of people who were joining the crowds but had no real interest in having their lives changed. They were like snakes wriggling away from a fire in the countryside ^{☐1}. They had no interest in living a godly life; they simply wanted to escape from God's judgement. They thought that they were good Jews because they were descended from Abraham. They imagined that they would be safe if they became a bit religious and joined John the Baptist's meetings ^{☐2}. But John warns them. God does not require a good ancestry. He can raise children to himself from the dead stones ^{☐3}. Salvation does not require a starting point in Jewish ancestry (or Christian ancestry!) God starts from zero when He brings us to salvation ^{☐4}.

These 'religious' people are still under the judgement of God. Unless they come to experience salvation they will still soon be punished for their sins. God's punishment of sin will be like chopping down a fruitless tree and throwing it into the fire.

^{☐1} Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:4-6; Matthew 3:3
^{☐2} in Luke 3:5-6

^{☐1} 3:4-6

^{☐2} 3:4

^{☐1} 3:4

^{☐2} 3:5

^{☐3} 3:5

^{☐1} 3:6

^{☐2} 3:6

^{☐1} 3:7-9

^{☐1} 3:7

^{☐2} 3:8a

^{☐3} 3:8b

^{☐4} 3:8b

• **Fire that exterminates rubbish**

Fire is often used as a picture of judgement; Luke's references to fire are in 3:9, 16, 17; 9:54; 12:49; 17:29; 22:55. Fire exterminates, wipes out of existence. Rubbish is thrown into fire ¹. The fire cannot be put out; it is 'unquenchable' ². It exterminates rubbish. So it 'cleanses' ³ by wiping out of existence the dirt ⁴; it 'burns up'. Every reference to 'burning up' ¹ in the New Testament ⁵ has the idea of utter extermination. What is burned up 'passes away' ⁶. John warned that everything of the lives of religious people would come under the exterminating fire of God, like rubbish being thrown into a burning pit, unless they find salvation through John's message. (The parable of the rich man and Lazarus makes it clear that the fire of God's judgement continues after death; 'I am in agony in this flame' said the rich man, Luke 16:24.)

¹ 3: 3:9
² 3:17
³ 3:17
⁴ 3:17
⁵ Matthew 3:12; 13:30, 40; Luke 3:17; Acts 19:19; 1 Corinthians 3:15; Hebrews 13:11; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 8:7; 17:16; 18:8
⁶ 2 Peter 3:10

3. A ministry of detailed holiness teaching

• **A godly life is marked by generosity and kindness**

3. **John was exercising a ministry of detailed holiness teaching.** Luke 3:10–14 has no parallel in Matthew or Mark. John gave detailed instruction about how the godly life worked out in practice. The essence of the godly life is generosity and kindness ¹. People working for the Romans as tax collectors or soldiers could continue their work but should do so in a just and godly manner. Tax collectors should abandon their oppression ². Soldiers could continue their work but should not use their forceful ways to oppress people ³. John is not an absolute pacifist; he allows his converts to be soldiers. But he requires that they do their work with righteousness.

¹ 3:10–11
² 3:12–13
³ (3:14)

• **John's was a holiness movement**

It is clear that one part of John's ministry involved detailed teaching in the ways of righteousness. John's revival-movement was a 'holiness movement'. Today the entire Christian Church is to be a 'holiness movement'. Every part of the Bible is 'holiness teaching'. John's ministry is an 'Elijah-ministry', a restoring ministry, a work in which God raises up a man to bring the Church back to what it ought to be. It begins with the preaching of Jesus; 'the Lord' ¹ who is about to come is Jesus. He is a Saviour who gives new birth; He raises up children for God ². He is a Saviour who leads people into ways of godliness. He is the Saviour who comes for 'all flesh' ³. He is the One who one day will be the judge. This is what 'revival preaching' is. It is the message of God's hatred of sin, and God's provision of a Saviour, applied in power to the consciences of men and women.

¹ 3:4
² 3:8
³ 3:6

• **Today the entire Christian church is called to be a 'holiness movement'**

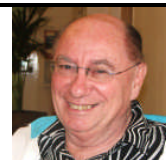
Note

1. Greek kataischuno.



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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